DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 031 EA 029 873

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TITLE Management, Transformation, and Social Influence: Longitudinal Impact of Reform on Leadership in Four British Primary Schools.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Change; *Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Role; *Educational Change; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Instructional Leadership; Leadership Responsibility; Longitudinal Studies; *School Administration
IDENTIFIERS England (Oxfordshire); Head Teachers

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of four headteachers in England and how they made sense of the changing nature of the headship from 1993-98. It views their experiences across three leadership "frames"--the managerial, the transformative, and the critical--to describe the way that leadership is both conceived and manifest. It focuses on the following questions: How have headteachers' conceptions of leadership changed over time during the implementation of education reform? What are the central aspects of the emerging roles of headteachers that define how they spend their time? How do headteachers negotiate the boundary between managerial demands and leadership imperatives? and What tensions or opportunities do headteachers experience with increasing headship experience? Data collection included semistructured interviews, nonparticipant observations, and document analysis. Each interview was transcribed and a modified grounded-theory approach was used in data analysis and theory building. The data suggest that the headteachers moved from being initially overwhelmed with the role changes in headship to a new level of expressed assurance with their role as headteachers. The findings are separated into three themes: the increasingly complex articulation of leadership understanding; the developing expertise in using leadership capacity to counter new managerialism; and institutional self-confidence and headteacher roles. Contains 22 references. (RJM)

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ED 432 031

MANAGEMENT, TRANSFORMATION, AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE: LONGITUDINAL IMPACT OF REFORM ON LEADERSHIP IN FOUR BRITISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association,
Montréal, Quebec, Canada, April 19, 1999

EA029873

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Introduction

> *I think that the external agenda continues to throw up new things all the time that we have to get to grips with. I think that one of the challenges of headship is trying to remain in control when you have an external agenda. You can be in control if you're generating the agenda, but if someone externally says, "Look you've got to gear yourself up for nursery vouchers this year, you've got to introduce baseline assessment" then there's no choice in that. You just have to manage it.*
>
> *As you know, I believe that autonomy at the local school is a myth. It's one of the myths of local management of schools. Local management of schools was sold to headteachers by saying that headteachers and the school community's governors would have more control over the education... that is a myth. The real control is with government who have side-stepped the local education authorities. So, control is with government and schools are performing a middle-management function of the headteachers. That's my view.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 10.30.96)

These are challenging times in school leadership in many countries. In England and Wales, the last decade of educational reform has completely altered the role of those who occupy the influential position of headteacher[1]. This redefinition has been comprehensive–shaping the context of leadership in schools, the managerial skills required to implement educational reform, the nature of teaching and learning, and governance structures. In the midst of this change, the role of the headteacher remains (as in other countries) pivotal to the conceptualization of school effectiveness. What is often missing, however, is a long-term view of those changes through the eyes of the post-holders, the headteachers. This is particularly so for headteachers at the primary level.

The educational leadership literature is replete with calls for more transformational leadership and for more effective leadership in the turbulent world of school reform (Leithwood, 1993; Vandenberghe, 1995). Building on two decades of "effective schools" literature, the centrality of principal/headteacher leadership is asserted time and again. Sergiovanni (1995) notes in reviewing the "characteristics of successful schools" that, "research indicated that one difference between high and low achieving schools was the impact of the principal" (p. 146). Principal/headteacher leadership, particularly leadership around the instructional mission of the school, rises time and again as an imperative for schools that are moving forward. Simultaneously, what is abundantly clear is that one important outcome of legislated school reform is increased managerial requirements for school leaders. School leaders encounter managerial pressures for

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1 The focus of this study has been on British headteachers. However, throughout this paper, the term "principal" is used in a manner to suggest equivalent roles. Although there are differences in historic background, qualification, preparation, and some duties, I suggest that the similarities outweigh the differences–hence the interchangeability of the terms in some sections of this paper.

compliance with externally derived school reform (which powerfully shapes the actions of headteachers/principals) while simultaneously adhering to their tacit commitment to instructional leadership. In many respects, as illustrated in the opening quote, this represents a potent paradox. Externally imposed reform often necessitates managerialism, yet leadership literature, and society at-large, express further calls for "leadership" rather than "management" of schools.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the experiences of headteachers in this turbulent time of school reform, particularly how they are making sense of the leadership/managerial/ influence paradox. One way to bracket their experience is to view their experience across three leadership "frames" (after Bolman & Deal, 1991): the managerial, the transformative, and the critical; to describe, through the lived-experience of practicing administrators the way that leadership is both conceived and manifest. To achieve this end, this paper draws on case studies of four British primary headteachers and their experience of the changing nature of headship from 1993-1998[2].

Although the cases examined are limited to British education, the issues described are increasingly common across many countries. The influences of centrally mandated educational reform, notions of increased educational standards and accountability, choice, and marketization are common in the United Kingdom, Unites States, New Zealand, and many other countries (Williams, Harold, Robertson, & Southworth, 1997; Portin, 1998). This study serves, then, to inform the discussion of school leadership across national boundaries allowing the reader to judge the comparative validity to their own national setting.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

(1) How have headteacher conceptions of leadership changed over time during the implementation of education reform?

(2) What are the central aspects of the emerging roles of headteachers that define how they spend their time?

(3) How do headteachers negotiate the boundary between managerial demands and leadership imperatives?

(4) What tensions or opportunities do headteachers experience with increasing headship experience?

This study has evolved over the past several years. It has grown from a doctoral study (Portin, 1995) to a longitudinal study of the changing nature of headship. Initially, the study

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2 The period of data collection analyzed in this paper is 1993-1998. However, the research is ongoing and further data collection occurred in March 1999.

addressed the dual questions of how the role of headteachers were changing and how, at that point in time, they were conceptualizing "leadership" as a construct. As such, it formed an important base for the longer term examination of headship.

Currently, there are more interesting questions to begin to address in our understanding of headship. We can say with a high degree of confidence that the role of headteacher has changed and we have a good understanding of the impact of reform legislation on the specific managerial and leadership actions of headteachers. What this longitudinal study affords is the opportunity to: a) examine the evolving conceptions of leadership by a stable cohort of headteachers as they gain more experience in headship; b) explore the impact of new initiatives that are enacted by succeeding governments[3]; and finally, c) to examine the interaction of the changing policy environment with career maturation and evolving conceptions of leadership. In the end, I hope that these opportunities to examine longitudinal impact and change in headship may hold greater opportunity for deep conceptualization in the realm of leadership theory. However, a more full discussion of that topic remains for a future paper.

Central Problem

Transforming or just transformed? Recently, Southworth (1999) has suggested that in the current period of educational reform in England and Wales the policy consequences have produced more shaping of headship toward managerialism than toward the ideal of transformational leadership. Southworth claims,

> One of the major changes taking place in headship is the fact that there is more and more to administer and manage. Expressed another way, while school improvement might look on first sight to encourage heads to be transformational leaders, it may, in fact, stimulate only more transactional management. (p. 62)

Southworth is not the only researcher noting the clash between managerial dominance in and the call for transformational leadership by headteachers in schools. Webb and Vulliamy (1996) arrived at a similar conclusion. They suggest that:

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3 This study was begun during the Conservative government of Prime Minister John Major, and now continues under Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour administration.

> Not only is there currently a tension between administrative and curriculum leadership demands of primary-school headship, there is also a growing tension between collegial and top-down management strategies at the whole-school level... The current climate thus encourages headteachers to be powerful and, if necessary, manipulative leaders in order to ensure that he policies and practices agreed upon are ones they can wholeheartedly support and defend. The introduction into primary schools of teacher appraisal, school-development plans within which targets are set for individual teachers, and especially new roles for headteachers as resident inspectors, all favour the growth of top-down directive styles of management, albeit involving staff consultation, at the expense of more collegial approaches. (p. 313)

This paradox is echoed amongst a variety of leadership theorists and educational writers. Managerialism, transformational leadership, and critical leadership each have their adherents. Managerial experts, most often those in governmental and policy circles, look to school leaders to be the "CEOs" of their schools, to take charge, to exercise powerful leadership, and to excel in entrepreneurial creativity. Transformationalists–those looking for a reform of the school's culture–focus on the daily relationship between leader and follower and the facilitative dimensions of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1990, 1995). Furthermore, those utilizing critical perspectives (Smyth, 1993) point to the social context and moral purposes of schools.

In whatever way leadership is conceived, it is widely held that we need more of it, and that headteachers and principals remain key figures in the overall effectiveness of the school's mission of educating children.

Further Theoretical Background

Leadership theory viewed through three frames (traditional managerial perspectives, transformational leadership theory, and "critical perspectives") forms the core of this examination and supports the questions posed. Traditional management theory is concerned with the day-to-day operational needs of the school, with the efficient and effective running of the school. Leadership activities of this type are grounded in positional authority and the traditionally conceived custodial responsibilities for the school. Leadership, from this perspective, requires "ordinary" levels of commitment (Sergiovanni, 1990) from organizational members and is often founded on "transactions" (Burns, 1978) between supervisors and subordinates.

Transformational leadership, as inaugurated by Burns (1978) and extended by many others, shifts the focus from the day-to-day operation of the school to primary focus on the relationship between leaders and followers. Transformational perspectives attend to the processes that school communities go through to determine the central direction and vision of the school, as well as the notion of building the shared leadership capacity of others in schools (Murphy &

Hallinger, 1993). Related terms for transformational leadership include such terms as "facilitative," "empowering," "moral" and "community-building."

The third leadership frame that informs this study are perspectives informed by critical theory (Foster, 1989; Smyth, 1989, 1993). Broadly speaking, this frame delves deeper into organizational relationships, particularly the exercise of power in organizations. The moral dimensions of leadership are exposed and the emancipatory nature of self-leadership to both free practitioners from un-reflective practice and to effect change for social justice and democracy become apparent. I see many overlaps between the critical and transformative aspects of leadership theory. In this paper, however, the critical perspectives bring focus to the empowering nature of headteacher action and their expressed commitment to counter hegemonic forms of the de-professionalization of educators subtly present in some educational reform legislation.

In this paper, these three conceptual frames for leadership theory are represented in the actions and statements of the four study headteachers. Over the period of this study, their roles have continued to change as they balance the managerial demands of local control and their own commitment to an historic (and tacit) understanding of their role as pedagogical exemplars and instructional leaders (Grace, 1995; Hall & Southworth, 1997). How they interpret and access these three notions of leadership has been examined through interview questions over the period of this research; particularly for how their interpretations can change as well as the way they blend the actions of all three perspectives in the current dynamic policy environment in which they work.

Data Sources and Analysis

This paper is based on a qualitative study of four primary headteachers in Oxfordshire, England. The case studies of these headteachers are on-going, and represent longitudinal data collected over the period 1993-1998. Methods include extensive semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Each headteacher interview has been transcribed and a modified grounded theory approach is used in data analysis and theory building.

The initial period of study involved extensive time in the schools, approximately 245 hours were spent in the schools over the initial period of study (1993-1995). Since that time, each of the schools has been visited each academic year for approximately one-half day. Subsequent site visits occurred in October 1996 (1996-97 academic year), March 1998 (1997-98 academic year), and March 1999[4] (1998-99 academic year).

The four headteachers are all experienced heads of primary schools (ages 4-12), each with enrollment in excess of 250 (considered large primary schools in the UK context). The

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4 Data from these site visits are yet to be transcribed and analyzed and are not included in this paper.

headteachers were selected largely through opportunity sampling and are regarded as effective leaders by reputation with their peers and Local Education Authority (LEA) officers. I have been fortunate that the participants in this study have all remained in-post in their same schools for the period of this research. This participant stability has added to the depth of the data.

Owing to the limitations of sample size and sampling strategy, analytic generalization (Yin, 1989) is applied to the study. It is left to the reader to determine the external validity of the study in their own context. However, the power of a deep and longitudinal description of four headteachers over a period of five years, I believe, tells a compelling story, one that can add to our conceptual understanding of the potential pressures and effects of external reform on school leaders.

Findings and Discussion

The longitudinal data of the study suggest movement from being initially overwhelmed with the nature of the role changes in headship to a new level of expressed assurance with their role as headteachers. Part of their new confidence was bolstered by positive (if traumatic) school inspections and, no doubt, to their increasing competence as experienced leaders. However, the data suggest a process beyond leadership maturation.

Pascal and Ribbins (1998) in a recent anthology of transcripts from ten diverse headteachers in England and Wales have provided an additional set of views of primary headship. Their research (not longitudinal) utilizes a "life and professional career history approach" to examine the perceptions of headship held by their ten participants. Utilizing a career stage approach can be a useful contribution to an analysis of change perceptions and developed abilities of school heads. However, to better understand the nature of "structure" (Giddens, 1984) in the conceptions of leadership for these four headteachers a career stage approach seems not enough. I have set about in this study to weave a developmental understanding of the unique characteristics of each of the four individual headteachers with the nature of the experienced challenges from educational reform. It seems that describing the interplay of reform and conceptions of leadership across time has the potential for better understanding the challenges heads face and the type of support they may need for their agency.

For example, I do not believe that the headteachers' increased boldness in critiquing governmental reform can be solely understood as simply being more experienced. Instead, the data of this study suggest that certain key institutional events, such as the successful "survival" of an Ofsted inspection[5] is also a crucial contributor to "institutional self confidence."

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5 Ofsted (The government Office for Standards in Education) inspections are comprehensive, publicly reported inspections of each individual school in England and Wales. The inspections occur once every six years and typically involve a team of government trained inspectors in the school for several days and assessing all aspects

A number of themes are emerging from ongoing analysis of the data. In this paper, three are presented: increasingly complex articulation of leadership understanding; developing expertise in using leadership capacity to counter new managerialism; and institutional self-confidence and headteacher roles. Each are described in succession.

Increasingly Complex Articulation of Leadership Understanding

> *I've never run a school with a senior management team, and I didn't really intend to start now... I've decided that the most important thing is to keep the staff as a team, regardless of what happens to me.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher A, 10.29.96)

> *The other thing, of course, is that it's absolutely crucial to any of this* [instructional leadership] *happening is leadership. More and more I believe that you have to have vision, and that the average headteacher or principal in the United States is put in a middle management position, and that vision is not required. It's not an expectation of the role that you vision... With a leader or a headteacher what you see in the school is a manifestation of what they are thinking at the moment. So what we've got to do is get leaders to get up there, get up to the vision.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 3.23.98)

> *I think you need a vision, you need to know where you're going and how you're going to get there, and that you've got to find the personnel who are able to help you do that and achieve that, and then they need quite clear direction and guidance in what they're doing, and then you're way. That's the key issue, really.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher D 3.24.98)

> *We've got a very powerful senior management team now. My management structure's changed... I've flattened... Instead of having a pyramid system, I have a very flat system in which there are larger groups of people with a vested interest, and they all have financial knowledge.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher D, 3.24.98)

The headteachers in this study have become increasingly sophisticated in their understanding and articulation of the three frames of leadership (managerial, transformative, and critical). The terms they use are not always the same, but the conceptual frames evidence themselves as leadership imperatives at different times and for different purposes in the discourse of these four headteachers.

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of the school's planning, provision for individual student need, student performance, teaching quality, leadership and management, facilities, and implementation of the National Curriculum.

The heads use language which suggests that they think about their roles in both the maintenance activities associated with managerial action and the strategic activities associated with the longer term direction of the school. Their language, action, and reflection indicate that they think deeply about leadership–that their leadership has largely moved from a tacit domain to "discursive consciousness" (Giddens, 1984). Clearly, it is possible that one of the influences on their complex conceptions of leadership may be the nature of the research conversations we have had over the years of my involvement with them in this study. Over time, the heads have received case reports and read both original research data (Portin, 1995) and subsequent reporting in conference papers and journal articles (Portin, 1997, 1998, 1999). However, it is also apparent in conversations that this is only one source of influence on their thinking. Their self-reports suggest that whether they were involved in this study or not they would likely be actively involved in reading leadership literature, attending conferences and professional development activities, and thinking deeply about leadership.

There is also a personal element to their developing conceptions of leadership. All four of the headteachers have spoken candidly about personal influences on their understanding of leadership. Often quite value-driven, even spiritual, they readily report their attention to the normative aspects of their role, to the "pastoral care" dimensions to their work with staff and children, and their concern to be posing challenging questions that spur thinking about educational practice.

These headteacher recognize and articulate that they are powerful influences in the school. At the same time, their language is embedded with notions of "we" rather than "my" and they talk about their power in terms of the expectations of the role, rather than a personal manifestation of power-over. Their conceptions of leadership extend far beyond the minimal frame of managerial dimensions to headship.

Accessing the three frames of leadership theory

> *I'm not so worried about the detail as I was two years ago. I think my headship was concerned with picking up on detail all the time, trying to make sure that each member of staff was doing their little bit to make a contribution to the whole. I've stepped back from that worry of detail and I think I am strategically thinking much more effectively now.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 10.30.96)

I delegated so much responsibility to other people, and I've set up the expectation on other people on the instructional side. I've delegated my powers regarding instructional side to managers of curriculum areas; I expect them to deliver, I expect them to have an operational plan. And therefore, I support what they are doing, generally speaking, within our overall philosophy. But (when) I put my weight in, I prefer to call it leadership, not management. I think management is a subset of leadership, and I think leadership is the most important thing of all in a school.

(Primary Headteacher B, 3.23.98)

So, in four years I've obviously got to grips with other things, and I think it was mainly that the management structure had changed, I think that we were more confident about what we do.

(Primary Headteacher D, 3.24.98)

Headteachers in this study have become increasingly adept at simultaneously accessing their own (and other's) managerial skill–the leadership capacities of teachers and governors in their school, as well as a clear grounding in their central values. Moreover, they appear to move in and out of the three frames with relative ease. Whereas in the early years of the study, the heads expressed a degree of powerlessness from the shaping nature of externally imposed reform, they now describe a more balanced approach to exercising authority and influence and express more control over the activities of their day. This is suggestive of critical leadership.

Throughout the study, the headteachers reinforced the onerous nature of what has been termed the "new managerialism" of school leadership (Grace, 1995). However, as they have developed the leadership capacity of the school (largely the school governors and teacher leaders), they have found that they are returning to some of the instructional leadership activities that they previously held foremost. Their discourse reveals a conscious return to instructional leadership in their schools.

Renegotiating instructional leadership

I think I can demonstrate I'm a good teacher. I do that through assembly. You've got to be able to motivate... the people... but not as a class teacher. See, what makes this school successful isn't because I'm good going into a class and taking over the class and being a good teacher in front of a group of children for a while; that's not what makes this school successful. It may be necessary still for some of the staff to feel I could do that if the chips were down, because they then think, "Oh yes, he can do the job that I'm doing." But the skills I use to be successful here in this job have nothing to do with that. It has to do mainly to do with confidence; it is the degree to which I can create confidence in my staff, in my parents, in the community, in the governors, in the local education authority.

(Primary Headteacher B, 3.23.98)

In fact, next term, I'm going to be teaching full time for the term, an incredible commitment. We've had a sudden resignation that we had not predicted from a member of staff, and teacher supply is appalling... I wouldn't hide the fact that some of the reasons are budgetary, but some are a need to actually influence from within and be seen to be part of team.

Primary Headteacher C, 3.23.98)

[When asked if the Ofsted inspection had been an impetus to greater involvement of governors in curriculum leadership...] *No, I think it's been within our decision making, rather than forced upon us. Yes, I think undoubtedly, Ofsted has influenced some of the things that we have done, but I think in the end we made the decisions, rather than the decisions being made for us.*

(Primary Headteacher C, 3.23.98)

Now, quality support teaching is not just sitting in the classroom and going through the motions... You've got to know the children, first of all, very well. You've got to know their needs. They've got to know you and have faith in you that you're able to work with them, and the teachers must have faith in you that you're able to do it. So, to deliver the National Curriculum properly in support teaching I had to go in to a lot of the planning and know the children well. I did a lot of teaching last year, probably three days a week, through the summer term and probably into the September term.

(Primary Headteacher D, 3.24.98)

The heads in this study, to a person, have all moved to a greater degree of involvement in the instructional program of the school. Initially, it appears that the managerial demands of LMS (local management of schools) and the other provisions of the 1988 and 1993 Education Acts were primary in determining how they spent their time. For these heads of large schools the opportunity to be regularly involved in instructional delivery was limited to occasional and supply (substitute) teaching.

In the course of the interviews in 1996 and 1998, all four of the heads indicated that they were more involved in the instructional program. They described their involvement as more than just occasional substitute teaching, they were timetabled into the teaching schedule and assumed responsibility for planning and assessing student work for those segments. In the course of further questioning, I wondered why this would be the case. All of the heads indicated that it was partly budgetary. In other words, due to teacher leaves, resignations, or other factors they chose to save the school budget and provide the teaching themselves rather than bringing in a supply teacher.

Budget was not the only reason the heads spoke of when describing their increased classroom involvement. Other reasons shared suggest that the heads feel a continuing commitment to show their pedagogical expertise to the school. The notions of headteacher-as-pedagogical-exemplar are deeply connected to the role and the heads continue to reveal their commitment to this

goal, at least in some form. Further comments suggest that this has also been a means by which they can continue to engage with the instructional program, particularly so when Ofsted inspections were pending.

Even if the primary impetus was budgetary, it does seem that their re-engagement with classroom teaching also reflects a growing sense of confidence and competence in the managerial demands of the school. Well-briefed governors, able bursars, and delegated authority are characteristics of efficient management that the heads describe. This seems to suggest that taming the managerial aspects of their jobs, has allowed these heads to re-engage with their instructional leadership role in the school.

Developing Expertise in Using Leadership Capacity to Counter New Managerialism

> *I've said before, haven't I, that in this country and I think in the United States, we've got our 19th century model of what education is, and we bolt on, bolt on, bolt on... instead of stopping and saying to ourselves, Hey, folks, what do we really want to get here? What is the purpose of education? What's the real purpose? And once we've identified our purpose, how best can we achieve that? Bearing in mind that we should balance the human being in the affective and the intellectual sides. And not just as we're doing here, making this beeline for the instrumental side...*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 3.23.98)

> *Well, the whole business of statistics. Get rid of it... I'm very very disturbed with people equating better SATs[6] results with better education. I find it very deeply disturbing.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher A, 3.24.98)

> *In the midst of good intentions and this rush to raise standards, it is a question of what standards are? In this government's mind they're even more tightly defined than in the previous government's mind... that standards are basically achievements in SAT tests at the end of Year 6 for primary schools, and that is very much a test across a very restricted area of working. So, it all points to schools focusing on a very narrow curriculum. To achieve that, the government has said that if schools do not come up to what is considered to be the right level, they will be "named and shamed"... Which doesn't do the best for anyone's morale.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher C, 3.23.98)

6 Standard Assessment Tasks.

> *We've had the arguments about league tables[7], and I'm still passionately against league tables. I still think that it's wrong. I think that the whole system is wrong. And it's leading to, and acknowledged now to be leading, to schools coaching the children to get the higher scores in the tests so that they're higher up the league tables, which is against every principle I believed in and worked for all my life in education.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher D, 3.24.98)

> *I'll say what I've always felt. I'll say my peace and then, fine. If it's not popular, it's not popular. But the end of the day we'll get on with what we do and see how it goes... I think you have to be honest and stand up against things.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher D, 3.24.98)

Armed with a new confidence from positive school inspection reports, the heads have described additional activities undertaken that they believe are critical for the purposes of a wider dialogue about education. Through writing, speaking and collegial consultation, they have sought to reinforce a child-centered approach to education in the face of mandates for more didactic teaching, and they have continued to express resistance to competitive marketization forces– preferring to embrace cooperation with surrounding schools.

As noted in earlier research (Portin, 1995), part of the collegiality of Oxfordshire schools seems to trace back to the influence of its former Chief Education Officer, Prof. Tim Brighouse. Prof. Brighouse's influence has been mentioned by all the heads at various times in the course of this research. The ethic of collegiality and cooperation he instilled appears to continue to this day in the comments of the headteachers. The headteachers spoke of the threats to collegiality, particularly the aspects of national education reform that are specifically designed to induce competition between schools for the purpose of attracting students. Although each of the schools in this study would be advantaged in league table reporting of student achievement, all have declared an opposition to this as a strategy for comparing schools or reporting school effectiveness. In some cases, they are quite vocal about their opposition to league tables. Through their various collegial affiliations, they are regarded as experts and as influentials who have a voice in shaping the practice of headship.

In addition, the headteachers spoke of their priority to increase the capacity of critical reflection amongst the teachers in their schools. They have instilled environments where the change process has been harnessed in such as way as to empower teachers to manage change, rather than change managing them. Most often, this is expressed in two ways. First, in the type of questioning that they introduce into the conversations within the school. As one head reported,

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7 The rank order reporting of individual school's SATs results in the press.

> *On the instructional side. I think I'm doing more now on looking to see what processes are happening in classrooms than, perhaps, I was doing two years ago. What is quality teaching? Can we identify it? What is happening when someone is really teaching well? What are the skills involved?*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 3.23.98)

The second strategy arising from the data has been the proactive adaptation of imposed change toward the self-determined instructional goals of the school. The most recent government initiatives, the "Literacy Hour," and the soon to follow, "Numeracy Hour," are proposed to address governmental concerns for student achievement in these two central content areas. The initiatives, while not mandatory, require schools to demonstrate their efforts to improve and address the literacy and numeracy achievement of pupils in the school. As such, the content is prescriptive and, particularly troubling to the heads in this study, so is the pedagogy. The heads describe presenting the Literacy Hour requirements to the school staff as a means of accomplishing the instructional goals they have already set for the school. In some cases, they are implementing much of the Literacy Hour curriculum as presented by the DfEE (Department for Education and Employment), in other cases they are adapting the materials or comparing the curriculum plans to their in-place instructional program. In the latter case, they are prepared to explain their decisions to any inspecting agency and how their program meets the literacy needs identified in the Literacy Hour initiative.

> *How do we get through? How do we take these strains and stresses. I said that my view is that we did have to go with them, but we would customize them to meet the needs of this school and its children. And that is what we are seeking to do. We are not seeking to make work where we don't need to make work.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher C, 3.23.98)

> *Well, we're right back to square-one now... I think our senior management team more and more feel that what we have in place at present is a reasonable approach to teaching as broad a based curriculum as we can... So you would hate to lose all those areas now... we're wrestling, really, with how we'll actually bring it into the "hour" they imagine us doing, the hour of literacy and targeting, and that.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher D 3.24.98)

This has been a consistent characteristic of these four schools. As school communities, they seem to express a high degree of institutional resilience to imposed change, particularly as they adapt to externally imposed reform. This links to the next category, "institutional self-confidence and headteacher roles."

Institutional Self-confidence and Headteacher Roles

> *I'm much more overt... in the sense that I'm much more prepared now to stand up and be much more open about it rather than being slightly... always slightly sensitive and working through other people in a gentle way. Quite prepared to stand up and be counted on this one... I find I don't need that affirmation anymore, and the affirmation I need is from my own conscience.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 3.23.98)
>
> [Speaking about nature of supportive relationship with the school's governing body] *But you must remember that it's partly good because we have one of the best Ofsted reports in the country... So, it's very difficult for people not to be pleased with you and the school and have a bad relationship when things are like that.*
>
> (Primary Headteacher B, 2.23.99)

Over the period of this study, each of the schools has prepared for and experienced at least one Ofsted inspection. As indicated earlier, these inspections are comprehensive, high-stakes reviews of all aspects of the school. The effect of these inspections has been variously reported by heads in this study (and others) as, at the least, exceptionally time consuming, and at the other end, one of the most traumatic experiences the school can endure. Partly due to the high stakes and public nature of the inspection report, headteachers (as noted by Southworth, 1999) find their institutional, and perhaps personal, reputation on the line.

In the case of these four schools, their inspection reports (all publicly available) have been positive and reveal the schools' many strengths. The schools, for the most part, represent a diverse cross-section of socioeconomic communities and serve students at-risk for educational failure. The inspection reports highlight their success in planning for the educational needs of all students.

An interesting theme that has developed from these conversations over time is the increased level of confidence the headteachers express in speaking out regarding reform efforts and the challenges faced in leading their schools. The means they use in sharing their views are largely collegial forums. School partnership meetings[8], meetings of LEA headteachers, headteacher professional associations, and other professional educational groups. The data seem to suggest that these four headteachers are sometimes regarded as "senior statesmen" amongst their peers–their opinions appear to carry weight.

As they participate in external critique of reform policy outcomes and champion the efforts of their schools, the nature of their discussion seems to suggest an increased boldness and directness. Perhaps associated with some of the leadership maturation issues identified by Pascal

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8 Local schools partnerships are usually comprised of the secondary school and its feeder primary schools. In some cases, the partnership group is more widely composed.

and Ribbins (1998), a longer term view would seem to suggest that the positive inspection reports have provided the headteachers, and their schools more broadly, the confidence to participate in external conversations about their educational values and aims for the future.

Looking for outside challenges

But I do feel it is time for me now, to come up out and give somebody the chance to have another to run it, and for me to do something to refresh...

(Primary Headteacher D, 3.24.98)

The final category, linking with the previous categories, is the search for outside challenges. In all cases the headteachers in this study are experienced leaders; in some cases they are viewing retirement in the not too distant future. Each of the four heads, over the period of the last two years, has both sought, and been sought after, for work beyond the confines of their individual schools.

Two of the headteachers have accepted temporary headteacher assignments in other schools needing temporary coverage. The assignments were in addition to their home school, essentially being headteacher in two schools. In both cases, the experience and regard of these headteachers served as an impetus for bringing them in to meet an acute need in another school. One of the other heads has worked temporarily at the LEA level in an advisory post–again, assisting other heads as needed predicated on his experience level. The fourth headteacher, and to a more limited extent, the other three, has utilized outside professional association commitments as an avenue of new challenge, professional renewal, and influence. The central point is that all four of the headteachers have taken on significant roles of responsibility beyond the scope of their schools. The question continues to be why is this so?

The stories of each of these headteachers over the period of years suggests that the weaving of their added expertise, positive reputation and regard amongst colleagues, successful school inspections, and capacity building in the school through shared leadership has freed them to engage a more powerful voice and spread their influence beyond single schools.

Importance

The experience of these four headteachers yields an interesting and important message for the practice of school leadership: Leaders who appear to be strong in their present positions, when faced with the pressures of external reform, have the potential to tame the managerial imperatives. Furthermore, their actions suggest that management can be seen as part of the full exercise of leadership when properly wedded to transformational leadership and critical reflection.

With the development and implementation of new plans for headteacher preparation and training (i.e. the National Professional Qualification for Headship) in England and Wales, and the similar moves toward more comprehensive licensure in the United States, we seem to be at a crossroads. What this study suggests is that an increase in what might be termed "leadership savvy"–which frees heads from the dissonance of being managerial while simultaneously increasing their competence in accessing the three leadership frames–holds important potential for practitioner leadership development and perhaps an evolving means for addressing the continuing tension between leadership perspectives .

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